

MIRANDA

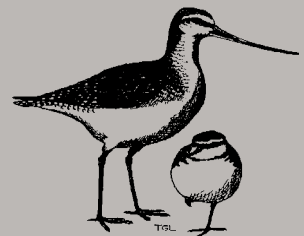
Naturalists' Trust

February 2009 Issue 72

NEWS



Photography Course
NZ Dotterels around Auckland



February 2009 Issue 72

From the Blackboard
01 February 2009

Upcoming Events

Feb 15 2009 OSNZ Firth of Thames Wader Census Contact the Centre for meeting time.	June 14 OSNZ Firth of Thames Census. All welcome, contact the Centre for details.
March 15 10am and 1:30 pm Autumn Migration Day Speaker: Keith Woodley, On the Tundra with nesting godwits. High Tide is at 11am so meet at 10 for birding, Speaker is at 1:30pm	June 21 Volunteer Potluck Dinner
May 17 10am Annual General Meeting Speaker: Andrew Swale on Man- groves	11-12 July Botanical Illustration Course
	August 29 Winter Pot Luck dinner
	August 30 Annual Working Bee.
	2009 course details see page 13

Cover: A New Zealand Dotterel at Kawakawa Bay. This nest was moved up to the second tyre and survived the high tides. See article on page 15.

Back Cover: Images from the 2008 photography course.
See page 18

A word from the editor

Identification is the fundamental skill in natural history. I've recently been involved in two of the courses at Miranda, Wader Identification in November, and more recently the Field Course. While the participants in these courses get different things out of them my aim is for participants to not only recognise the birds around them, but know why they are those birds and not others, why that individual godwit is Bar-tailed Godwit.

Once you have the ability to identify some of the common species around you it is much easier to recognise when you are seeing something new or unusual, once you know a few of the less common species the field guide starts to make more sense. And from this foundation grows the ability to find out further information and the confidence to get involved in further activities such as census, surveys or banding - or writing articles in MNT News

I'm happy to have two articles (both on NZ Dotterels) from participants in the Wader ID course in this newsletter, if you'd like to contribute, articles, photos, poems, please contact me. The deadline for the next issue is April 20th.

Gillian Vaughan

The Newsletter of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust is published four times a year to keep members in touch, and to bring news of events at the Miranda Shorebird Centre and along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission.

Arctic Migrants

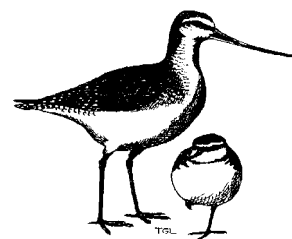
Bar-tailed Godwit	5000
Red Knot	1300
Turnstone	20
Red-necked Stint	2
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	8
Pectoral Sandpiper	1
Golden Plover	35
Little Tern	2

New Zealand Species

Pied Oystercatcher	4750
Wrybill	1900
NZ Dotterel	16
Variable Oystercatcher	
Black-billed Gull	
Red-billed Gull	
White-fronted Tern	
Caspian Tern	
Pied Stilt	1400
Spoonbill	5
White Heron	1

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Scenes in Kaipara Harbour.

Tens of thousands of Godwits.

David Medway

This is the title of an article by James Drummond that appeared 100 years ago in his “In Touch with Nature” column in the Evening Post of Wellington on 17 October 1908. The following passages, taken from that article, will be of interest to readers of MNT News. “A specially interesting contribution to the literature of the godwit has been sent to me by Mr. S. Percy Smith, the author of “Hawaiki”.

Mr. Smith prefers to call the bird by its Maori name, kuaka, which is commonly used in the northern parts of New Zealand. He says that about fifty years ago, in the “old days”, bird-life in the Kaipara district was surprisingly plentiful. This was very noticeable in regard to sea-birds. Vast numbers of sea-birds, amongst which the kuaka was prominent, used the mudbanks and sandbanks of the Kaipara Harbour as feeding-grounds. Those who are acquainted with the district merely by means of a map cannot realise the enormous extent of tidal waters in the harbour. They have a coastline of over four hundred miles within the Heads, and at low water there are many thousands of acres of mudbanks and sandbanks. In the summer-time, the mudbanks were alive with kuaka, which fed on the minute marine animals always found there. Mr Smith says that the vast flights of these birds, which passed up and down the harbour, according to the state of the tide, were almost incredible.

On Christmas Day, 1861, Mr. Smith was camped near the head of the Paparoa Creek, a broad expanse of muddy water, about two hundred or three hundred yards wide. As the tide rose, a flat sandy island, two acres in area, gradually became surrounded by water. The kuakas, ready for their flight to the Heads, assembled there in such great numbers that there seemed to be no foothold on the island for another bird. They must have numbered tens of thousands. At




photo Ian Southey

the moment when the leaders of the flock deemed it time to start, they all rose into the air together, with a noise of rustling wings like a gale of wind, and took their way to the outer waters. Many other seabirds, especially waders, frequented those mudflats.

It is most delicate eating, and, with a few precautions, is easily shot. I remember, in later years, crossing the Manukau in my Rob Roy canoe, which was the first one built in New Zealand. Having sent my party on in a whaleboat to pitch camp at Te Toro Point, I diverged from their course to fill in some topographical detail of the trigonometrical survey which I was then conducting. As I drew near the southern shore, I observed a little flat islet covered by innumerable kuaka, awaiting the time of flight to the Heads. Being always on the lookout to supplement our fare of potatoes, pipis, and tea without sugar, I took down my sail, prepared my double-barrel, and quietly drifted down with the wind towards the islet. When I

was within twenty yards, the kuaka rose in a mass. I fired one barrel, and then went ashore and picked up forty-three birds as the result of one shot. But this does not equal the number knocked over by an old friend of mine on the mud flats near Otahuhu, who bagged ninety-six birds with two barrels. These figures may seem to be exaggerations, but they are absolutely correct, and, no doubt, have often been exceeded. They are given merely to illustrate the enormous numbers of kuaka once seen in this country”.

Over many years a very large number of godwits must have been killed as game birds in New Zealand before they were afforded some statutory protection. As a direct result of this persecution, the number of godwits which visited this country annually was almost certainly reduced considerably over time. The population of godwits visiting New Zealand has probably never been able to recover numerically from that earlier onslaught. 



NZ Dotterels at Waiwera

Christopher Moses

While visiting my grandparents at Waiwera, a small town north of Auckland, my mother and I usually walk down to the beach in search of shorebirds. There have been many occasions in which we have seen a pair of New Zealand Dotterels, but until early August 2008, we hadn't seen any in a long time.


There is a pair of dotterels that have bred at Waiwera for many years, but after a storm that took place in early 2007, the sand spit in which they lived on disappeared. Consequently they didn't nest last summer, and left Waiwera in search of a new home. The male dotterel in the pair, BOB, is named after the colour bands on his right leg, after John Dowding banded him 17 years ago.

In August this year, my mother visited Waiwera and walked to the beach, where to her delight she saw five dotterels. I came down the next day and spotted six. We immediately thought they were going to nest so my grandparents phoned up DoC, and a few days later a ranger roped off the spit. During the following months, we observed several pairs mating, and on some occasions we spotted a few visiting dotterels. Finally, after many weeks, we found a nest. It had three eggs, and there was always at least one dotterel guarding it, who, if any people came near, ran off its nest and try to draw attention to itself.

Unfortunately, in the past years the dotterels have found it very difficult to breed successfully, because of humans treading on their nests, and predators eating their young. Thankfully, there aren't many stoats in the area, mostly because of the predator-free forest a few minutes walk away.

Sadly there are many gulls, harriers and Morepork that target the young, and often succeed in snatching them. Because of these dangers, not only the dotterels but also other nesting shorebirds such as the Variable Oystercatchers, struggle to raise their chicks. Hopefully though, in coming years humans will help these birds breed, and prepare appropriate nesting grounds.

Thankfully, all three eggs from one pair hatched, and I have observed three little balls of fluff trotting alongside their parents, searching for something to eat. Unfortunately, after about a month only one is left. I hope that it will soon be old enough not to be predated, and live to breed at Waiwera itself. Of the other two pairs, we have seen one of them on a nest, which has since been destroyed. Now it looks as though they are preparing for another nest, as does the other pair. After four months of observing the dotterels, up to nine individuals have been seen, many of which bore bands.

So if you ever find you have a spare weekend, Waiwera is the place to go. The Straka Lake is privately owned and is overflowing with waterfowl, such as NZ Dabchicks. Wenderholm Regional Park has breeding Pukeko, Fernbirds, Kingfishers, Tui, Grey Warblers, NZ Robins and many others. Five Brown Kiwi were released in the forest, but are no longer there. Then the beach, with two species of oystercatcher and our beloved NZ Dotterels. 



I was particularly interested in the article about the roof-top nesting Spurwing Plovers by Bruce Keeley in a recent Miranda News.

They are not the only pair nesting in an unusual place in Howick. Both in 2007 and again this year a pair of spurwings nested in the middle of the car-park of Elim House on Botany Road. This an overflow carpark for the East City Elim Christian Centre and has a small piece of lawn in the middle bounded by a wide wooden edge. The spurwings nested against that board so that at times were under the front of cars. The male got very stropky with people parking near the nest and would make a great to-do. Church officials arranged to leave that strip of lawn unmown during the nesting period. In 2007 they laid 4 eggs and all four hatched and fledged. I am not sure how many eggs they laid this year but three hatched and by the time they moved the chicks to the adjoining paddock one had disappeared. They created a great deal of interest to the many people who attend meetings at Elim House and I was called on on numbers of occasions to answer the question "What are those birds?" So hopefully they will be back next year. I am sure everyone who saw or heard about them will be keeping a watchful eye on that area next September.

Regards
Nancy Payne

*Photos facing page:
NZ Dotterel eggs, chick and adult.
Photos Christopher Moses.*

Miranda Records

1 July 2007 - 30 June 2008

A LIST OF SELECTED SPECIES

Most of these records are taken from the records book at the Miranda Shorebird Centre, however some records have had to be left out as the observers names were omitted. All records are kept but only a selection are published here. Please write your name clearly with your records. If you would like to contribute records from Miranda but don't know where the sightings book is then either ask at the desk or email your records to shorebird@farmside.co.nz. Thank you to all those who have contributed

Note: Figures preceded by 'Summer' or 'Winter' refer to OSNZ Census totals for the entire Firth of Thames. Summer census 18/11/07
Winter census 22/6/08.

Note: Rare birds in this report may not yet have been considered by the OSNZ Rare Birds Committee.

Buller's Shearwater
4 to 5 seen in Firth, 25/03/2008 (RS).

Black Shag: Summer 46 Winter 34.

Pied Shag: Summer 1306 Winter 693.

Little Black Shag: Summer 0, Winter 28.
2 on 21/03/08 (NM), 15 on 22/03/2008 (NM).

Little Shag: Summer 18, Winter 7.

Spotted Shag: Summer 0, Winter 50.
Several hundred flying north past the lime-works flying low over sea on 29/09/2007 (S&JR), similar numbers seen at Kaiaua on the same day (JV), on 30/09/2007 1200 flew in from the north before high tide, landed on the water just south of the shellbanks, they left 10mins later (GRV).

White-faced Heron: Summer 229, Winter 366.

White Heron: Summer 0, Winter 3.
1 bird present throughout the year (many obs), 2 seen on 26/8/07 (AMH), 22/03/2008 (NM), and 7/04/2008 (BK).

Cattle Egret: Summer 0, Winter 19.

Bittern: Summer 0, Winter 2.

1 at corner of Findlay /Miranda Road, feeding on open around 10:45 am on 8/07/2007 (ND), 1 crossing the road near Whakatiwai, disappeared into gravel on 28/07/2007 (JC).

Royal Spoonbill: Summer 2, Winter 14.
13 seen regularly through winter, numbers decreased into summer, 11 on 30/9/07 (AMH), 8 on 30/11/07 (D&MS), 7 on 27/4/08 (AMH) then increasing to 14 on 14/6/08 (AMH).

Black Swan: Summer 295, Winter 72.
5 on 29/9/2007 (S&JR), 3 on 9/12/2007 (AMH/DAL), 334 at the Whakatiwai Gravel Pits 7/04/2008 (BK).

Canada Goose: Summer 3, Winter 28.
44 at the Whakatiwai Gravel Pits 7/04/2008 (BK).

Paradise Duck: Summer 27, Winter 87.

Mallard: Summer 1072, Winter 1346.

Grey Duck: Summer 4, Winter 0.

Australasian Shoveller: Summer 6, Winter 162.
56 on 14/08/2007 (KW), 13 on 26/08/2007 (AMH), 20 on 7/09/2007 (AMH), 4 on 29/09/2007 (S&JR), 2 on 27/04/2008 (AMH), 20 on 14/06/2008 (AMH).

Grey Teal: Summer 87, Winter 91.
15 on 17/11/2007 (DAL), 20 on 27/04/2008 (AMH), 80 on 3/05/2008 AMH/ICS/WNCP).

Brown Teal: Summer 1, Winter 0.
2 records of a single bird. One on 17/11/2007 (DAL), and one on 3/02/2008 (AMH).

Banded Rail: Summer 1, Winter 0.
Once again bred on Widgery Lake. Seen by many from the Shorebird Centre. First seen on 30/11/2007 (GE, K Barrow, K Bond), 5-6 fluffy chicks on Widgery Lake with two adults seen on 29/12/2007 (TW/ES), 2 adults with 8 chicks seen from 3/01/2008 using the whole of Widgery Lake over the next few days (KW), 2 adults and 6 chicks seen 16/01/2008 (KW) on 12/03/2008 2 Banded Rail and a cat seen in Widgery Lake (BW).

Spur-winged Plover: Summer 162, Winter 190.

South Island Pied Oystercatcher:
Summer 1418, Winter 6197. 40 departing,

first noted for the year on 13/07/2007 (KW), 7 successive departures over 40 minutes, 150 - 160 birds in total on 17/07/2007 (KW), 24 at 2pm on 20/07/2007 (KW), 35 departing on 26/07/2007 (KW), 23 departing on 10/08/2007 (KW), 17 departing 1:20pm on 21/08/2007 (JH), 500 seen of which 58 departed on migration on 7/09/2007 (AMH), migration on 8/09/2007 (AMH/DAL), 110 at Piako on 23/09/2007 (AMH), 240 at Taramaire, 20 at South Kaiaua on 26/12/2007 (GRV), 1000 recorded regularly from January through March (AMH,GRV).

Variable Oystercatcher: Summer 43, Winter 160. Often undercounted, a pair on the shellbanks recorded regularly from 7/09/2007 to 17/02/2008, 7 seen on 7/9/07 (AMH), and 8/9/07 (GRV).

Pied Stilt: Summer 464, Winter 3298.
50 on 26/08/2007 (AMH), 1 dark smudgy on 2/09/2007 (WNCP/DG), 20 at Piako on 15/09/2007 (AMH/ACR), 151 on 17/11/2007 (DAL), 2 adults and 3 juveniles landed in middle of MSC driveway, then moved off on 30/11/2007 (KW), 13 at Boatclub on 26/12/2007 (GRV), 100 on 20/01/2008 (AMH), 528 on 22/03/2008 (NM), 500 on 3/05/2008 AMH/ICS/WNCP), several dark hybrids, 2 E-node, 1 F node, and 1 G node seen on 11/05/2008 (many obs)

New Zealand Dotterel: Summer 9, Winter 30. 1 - 3 recorded regularly from 8/09/2007 to 20/1/08 (many obs), 6 on 22/03/2008 (NM), 8 on 7/04/2008 (BK), 13 on 27/04/2008 (AMH), 12 on 11/05/2008 (many obs).

Banded Dotterel: Summer 0, Winter 204.
14 on 26/08/2007 (AMH), between 3 and 7 recorded from 2/09/2007 to 31/12/2007 (AMH, WNCP, DG, GRV), 20 on 19/01/2008 (AMH), 150 on 21/03/2008 (NM), 169 on 25/03/2008 (S&JR), 100 on 7/04/2008 (BK), 30 on 27/04/2008 (AMH).

Large Sand Dotterel: Summer 0, Winter 0.
2 records of a single bird, the first on 31/12/07 (AMH), then on 27/2/08 (S&JR).

Wrybill: Summer 26, Winter 1900.
1312 on 26/08/2007 (AMH), 550 on 2/09/2007 (WNCP/DG), 270 on 8/09/2007 (GRV), 80 on 6/10/2007 (AMH), 164 on 20/10/2007 (GRV), 26 on 17/11/2007 (DAL), 31 on 9/12/2007 (AMH/DAL), 49 on 22/12/2007 (GRV), 66 on 27/12/2007

(GRV), 198 on 29/12/2007 (GRV), 324 on 31/12/2007 (GRV), 908 on 19/01/2008 (GRV/ICS) 1000 on 3/02/2008 (AMH), 2000 on 17/02/2008 (AMH), 2500- 3000 on 20/03/2008 (NM), 2000 on 27/04/2008 (AMH), 2000 on 3/05/2008 (AMH/ICS/WNCP), 1000 on 14/06/2008 (AMH),

Pacific Golden Plover: Summer 57, Winter 0. 1 on 8/09/2007 (AMH/DAL), 3 at Piako on 23/09/2007 (AMH), no further records until 100 on 14/01/2008 (BK), then seen regularly, 36 on 19/01/2008 (AMH), 6 on 3/02/2008 (AMH), 41 on 17/02/2008 (AMH), 20 on 2/03/2008 (AMH), 71 on 7/03/2008 (JG), 97 on 10/03/2008 (BHS), 87 on 22/03/2008 (NM), 68 on 25/03/2008 (S&JR), 3 on 6/04/2008 (AMH), 37 on 7/04/2008 (BK), 2 very vocal birds were seen circling they then disappeared over the mudflats on 9/04/2008 (BK).

Ruddy Turnstone: Summer 18, Winter 6. 1 on 8/09/2007 (AMH/DAL), 3 on 15/09/2007 (AMH/ACR), 4 on 30/09/2007 (GRV), 4 on 28/10/2007 (GRV), 25 on 9/12/2007 (AMH/DAL), 32 on 31/12/2007 (AMH), 28 on 3/02/2008 (AMH), 22 on 6/04/2008 (AMH), 3 on 27/04/2008 (AMH), 5 on 3/05/2008 (AMH/ICS/WNCP), 1 on 11/05/2008 (many obs).

Red Knot: Summer 4270, Winter 375. 5 on 14/08/2007 (KW), 10, several with breeding plumage on 29/8/2007 (GK), 64 on 2/09/2007 (WNCP/DG), 53 on 7/09/2007 (AMH), 10 on 8/09/2007 (AMH/DAL), 400 on 23/09/2007 (GRV), 1 at Piako on 23/09/2007 (AMH), 1480 on 30/09/2007 (GRV), 400 on 30/09/2007 (AMH), 1800 on 6/10/2007 (AMH), 1 Red Knot in breeding plumage which was chased and pecked by other knots and godwits on 13/12/2007 (SL), only 460 seen on 26/12/2007 despite searches at all the roost sites from North Kaiaua to the Limeworks (GRV), 1815 on the stilt ponds the next day (GRV), 1860 on 17/02/2008 (AMH), 700 on 2/03/2008 and 8/3/08 (AMH), birds leaving on migration seen at 18:37 on 21/03/2008 (AMH), 300 on 27/04/2008 (AMH), 300 on 3/05/2008 (AMH/ICS/WNCP), 500 on 14/06/2008 (AMH).

Curlew Sandpiper: Summer 0, Winter 0. A single record of two birds on 3/2/08 (AMH).

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper: Summer 9, Winter 0. 2 on 29/09/2007 (S&JR), 11 on 3/11/2007 (TW/TC), 12 on 13/12/2007 (TB), 5 from 22/12/2007 to 7/01/2008 (BK, GRV, DAL), 9 on 19/01/2008 (GRV/ICS), 8 on 3/02/2008 and 2/03/2008 (AMH), 12 on 22/03/2008 (NM), 6 on 7/04/2008 (BK), 4 on 11/05/2008 (many obs).

Red-necked Stint: Summer 5, Winter 0. 1 on 26/08/2007 (AMH), 5 on 1/09/2007 (KW), 6 on 2/09/2007 (GRV), 1 to 3 recorded regularly from 8/09/2007 to 3/11/07

(many obs), 5 on 17/11/2007 (DAL), then 1 to 3 again from 30/11/2007 to 7/1/08 (many obs), only a single bird seen from 19/01/2008 to 25/3/08 recorded in breeding plumage from 27/02/2008 (many obs).

Whimbrel: Summer 22, Winter 0. 2 at Piako on 15/09/2007 (AMH/ACR), 1 at Piako on 23/09/2007 (AMH), 1 on mudflats at south end of Kaiaua on 20/10/2007 (JH), 1 roosting at South Kaiaua on 27/10/2007 (JV/GRV), 1 on Stilt ponds on 27/02/2008 (S&JR).

Little Whimbrel: Summer 0, Winter 0. A single record of one individual seen in front of the hide on 31/12/08 (JV, ICS, GRV), the bird was never resighted.

Bar-tailed Godwit: Summer 6985, Winter 588. 126 on 14/08/2007 (KW), 910 on 2/09/2007 (WNCP/DG), 1200 on 7/09/2007 (AMH), 1000, including one with droopy wings on 8/09/2007 indicating recent arrival (AMH/DAL), 1300 on 15/09/2007 (GRV), 300-400 at Piako River on 15/09/2007 (AMH/ACR), 1550 on 23/09/2007 (GRV), 780 at Piako on 23/09/2007 (AMH), 2200 on 30/09/2007 (GRV), 2346 on 20/10/2007 (GRV), 3600 on 28/10/2007 (GRV), 4500 on 26/12/2007 (GRV), 3000 on 20/01/2008 (AMH), 2500 on 17/02/2008 (AMH), 23 seen migrating on 21/03/2008 (AMH), 650 on 6/04/2008 (AMH), 100 on 27/04/2008 (AMH), 300 on 14/06/2008 (AMH).

Hudsonian Godwit: Summer 1, Winter 0. 1 seen regularly from 23/09/2007 to 22/3/08. Recorded in breeding plumage in March 08 (Many obs.)

Marsh Sandpiper: Summer 0, Winter 0. A single record of one bird on 13/5/08 (JV).

Terek Sandpiper: Summer 1, Winter 0. 1 reported to AMH on 30/09/2007, 1 on 9/12/07 (AMH), 1 on 13/12/2007 (TB).

Arctic Skua: Summer 0, Winter 0. A single record on 13/12/07 (TB).

Black-backed Gull: Summer 166, Winter 172.

Red-billed Gull: Summer 162, Winter 1983. Very rarely counted or commented on in the Miranda Records.

Black-billed Gull: Summer 873, Winter 1276. 110 on 26/08/2007 (AMH), 292 on 8/09/2007 (GRV), 529 on 23/09/2007 (GRV), 300 on 30/09/2007 (AMH), 100 on 6/10/2007 (AMH), 159 nests on outer shellbank, one on the close shellbank on 10/11/2007 (GRV), nests all washed out on 1/12/2007 (JH), 30 on 31/12/2007 (AMH), 100 on 20/01/2008 (AMH).

Black-fronted Tern: Summer 0, Winter 0. An unusual visitor to Miranda two records

of juvenile birds this year, one on 27/2/08 (S&JR), one on 16/03/2008 (many obs).

Caspian Tern: Summer 304, Winter 52. 52 on 26/08/2007 (AMH), 15 at Piako on 15/09/2007 (AMH/ACR), 2 on 18/09/2007 (M&IS), 41 at Piako on 23/09/2007 (AMH), 1 on 31/12/2007 (AMH).

White-fronted Tern: Summer 1030, Winter 20. While regularly seen this species is not regularly recorded. A single record of 35 at the Boatclub at Kaiaua 26/12/08 (GRV).

Little Tern : Summer 1, Winter 0. 1 to 2 seen from on 30/09/2007 to 9/12/2007 (many obs), 3 on 13/12/2007 (TB), 3 on 14/01/2008 (BK), only single records from 20/01/2008 to 22/03/2008 (many obs).

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo
45 just north of Miranda reported in Jan-08 to DAL, 50 on road to Miranda on 14/06/2008 (AMH),

Rook: Summer 0, Winter 30. 18 seen from Shorebird Centre on 19/01/2008 (GRV/ICS), 16 flying over limeworks on 7/04/2008 (BK), 3 flying south west of Shorebird Centre on 28/05/2008 (JH), 25 being harassed by harrier in a field to north of the Centre on 9/06/2008 (JH).

Contributors:

TB, Tim Barnard
K Barrow, Kathy Barrow
K Bond, Ken Bond
JC, Jono Clark
TC, Tony Crocker
ND, Nola Dyson
GE, Gillian Eller
DG, Delight Gartleyn
JG, John Groom
AMH, Tony Habraken
PH, Phil Hammond,
JH, Jenni Hensley
BK, Bruce Keeley
GK, Geraldine King
DAL, David Lawrie
SL, Sarah Lovibond
NM, Nigel Milius
WNCP, Will Perry
GAP, Gwenda Pulham
ACR, Adrian Riegen
S&JR, Stella and John Rowe
M&IS, Martin and Irene Sandhu
ICS, Ian Southey
D&MS, Don and Muriel Tracey
ES, Emma Stanyard
BHS, Betty Seddon
BS, Barry Stevens
RS, Richard Scofield
GRV, Gillian Vaughan
JV, Janie Vaughan
GW, George Watola
TW, Tony Wilson
KW, Keith Woodley
BW, Bev Woolley
TW, Terry Wyatt

Chairman's Report

David Lawrie

As stated in my previous report the Assistant Manager's position has now been taken up by Maria Stables-Page, following Jenni Hensley's departure for overseas. At the volunteers thank you barbecue on 30 November Jenni was farewelled and on her departure she presented the Trust with the set of binoculars in a case which is now on display in the Centre. We wish her well on her travels and I understand



*Jenni and the Emergency Binoculars;
you don't need to break the glass.
Photo David Lawrie*

that she is returning to Miranda briefly in September 2009.

Maria has now settled in to the position and also in organising the volunteers. Members who have visited the Centre would have met Maria, if not make yourselves known on your next visit. Do not be confused however if her hair colour changes, as that is part of her disguise.

During December, Miranda Berghuis from the Netherlands assisted at the Centre and also attended the hide on a daily basis during the high tide periods where she was reportedly a good source of information. We thank her for her efforts. Her name however did cause some confusion as she tried to introduce herself as Miranda from Miranda, and further with her Dutch friends who they could not find the location of Miranda on their maps.

Donations:

The Trust is always grateful for any donations, as these assist us in continuing our work. We recently received a substantial donation from Duncan Bamfield, who is a life member signed up by Dick Sibson in the early days of the Trusts' formation. Duncan was one of Sib's pupils at Kings College.

We have also received a further large donation from Colleen Seay, who is also a long term life member.

We appreciate the support from these long standing members and it is good to see their continuing interest in the Trusts' activities.

The Trust is registered as a Charity which means that any donations to the Trust are tax deductible and now that the Government has changed the rules on donations there is no longer an upper limit on deductible donations.

Centre Activities:

In the middle of January the annual field course was held with another full attendance and a waiting list!!! This year's attendees were an interesting mix of people but all with a common interest to learn that meant that they melded together as a team.

I thank Eila Lawton and her team of tutors, all of whom are essential to the running of this very successful event. We thank them particularly for giving so freely of their time to make the field course the intensive but interesting week that it has become.

As mentioned in the previous newsletter the Firth Trust donated the money for a new concrete water tank

and this has now been installed to increase our storage capacity to reduce our reliance on tanker supplies of water through the summer period.

In recent times the sky lights have been removed from the bunk rooms as it was believed that these were the cause of leaks into these rooms. They were also a nesting ground for birds and were generally a nuisance without any real benefit. However the removal of these did not solve the leak in the bunk room and this turned out to be a hole in the guttering but that has now been fixed (we hope!).

Ramsar Meeting - South Korea:

The meeting of contracting parties to the Ramsar agreement met in early November in South Korea. Estella Lee, one of the Trust Council members attended in a private capacity but also represented the Trust at a number of NGO meetings and handed out bundles of brochures. The meet-



*Miranda Berghuis on the shellbanks
Photo David Lawrie*

ing comprised 2000 participants representing the 158 Governments who are signatories to the agreement.

The official New Zealand delegation comprised three members from the DOC office in Wellington; they will be providing a formal report in due course that will be published in the newsletter. The theme of this conference was healthy wetlands – healthy people.

The messages I have received from the conference are rather mixed, there were a total of 33 resolutions passed, several of those were acknowledging the importance of protecting feeding areas for migratory shorebirds. However the actions of some of the key countries surrounding the Yellow Sea following the conference seem to indicate that the resolutions are largely being ignored and that is clearly of concern.

North Korea & China:

The Trusts' activities in China and in particular at Yalu Jiang will continue during this coming autumn migration period. The team will continue the training of the reserve staff and will also assist in undertaking shorebird census work and bird capture and banding exercises.

I have recently also received confirmation that the North Korean Government is willing to host a team from Miranda at the end of April 2009 and we are currently making the application for the necessary visas. It will also be necessary to raise a substantial sum of money to ensure

that the participating members do not have to meet the full costs. This is an exciting project that will be the first foreign expedition into that country hoping to provide data on the use of the North Korean shore line by the migratory shorebirds and in particular the Red Knot.

External Activities:

In my last report I mentioned the informative sign that the Trust had prepared and erected at Big Sand Island in the Kaipara Harbour, utilising funding supplied by the coastal enhancement fund of the Auckland Regional Council.

This sign received many compliments and it appeared to be fulfilling a useful advocacy role.


Unfortunately I received news that the sign had been vandalised and torn out of the ground over Christmas, presumably by a rather large vehicle as the posts had been set in concrete. To me this is a most sickening response to a sign that was merely providing public information and was totally non-threatening or of a regulatory nature. The sign has now been re-erected; we hope that it has a longer life. My thanks to Adrian Riegen who designed, built, erected and re-erected it!

I have also been participating in discussions with Wetland Link International which is an offshoot of the Wild Fowl and Wetlands Trust based in London. We are currently trying to

establish a linkage between wetland centres throughout the world but particularly in the Oceania region. I have taken a lead role in this process because the Miranda Naturalists' Trust is the longest established wetland centre in New Zealand. The long term aim of the grouping is to arrange for a sharing of ideas and educational material on an international basis that will also allow for funding to be obtained internationally which should have long term benefits for all wetland centres. I will report further in due course once more details are available.

the actions of some of the key countries surrounding the Yellow Sea indicate that the resolutions are largely being ignored

Learnz Programme:

Several years ago the Trust participated in the Learnz Programme, an on-line school educational programme. We were invited to participate again in the coming year but unfortunately our participation was going to cost \$5,000. While the Trust believes the programme would have been useful and a wonderful avenue for raising awareness of shorebird advocacy it is something we were not able to fund. The Trust will be seeking avenues of funding to allow us to participate again the future. If any members know of potential sponsors or sources of revenue that may be suitable for that project do not hesitate to contact the Centre. 

AGM and nominations for Council

The Annual General Meeting of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust will be held at the Shorebird Centre on May 17th 2009 at 10 am.

Nominations are called for the positions of Secretary, Treasurer, Auditor and 10 Council members. Please have your nominations with the Secretary, Will Perry, by the eighth of May. His address is on the inside of the back cover of this magazine. Your letter should have the name of the person you are nominating, your name and the name of someone to second the nomination. Everyone involved must be financial members of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

AGM Agenda

Apologies for Absence

Minutes of the last AGM May 11th 2008

Matter Arising from the minutes

Chairman's Report

Treasurer's Report

Election of Officers

(Treasurer, Secretary Auditor, 10 Council Members)

Subscriptions for the year ending 31/12/2010

General Business

from the MANAGER

Keith Woodley

The baked browns of late summer once more surround the Centre. Periodic heavy showers through December kept a sliver of water across the bed of Widgery Lake, but really it was just delaying the inevitable, and by the last week in January the bed was fully exposed and dry. Water levels prior to that, along with the profusion of thick reeds now lining the edge of the lake meant any rail activity was



even more discreet than usual. The first record for this season was one I saw swimming across the lake on 4 December, but after that a glimpse of movement in the reeds was often the only indication of their presence. Then on 14 January three chicks were seen moving through the reed edge; if others were present they remained hidden and by the beginning of the field course only two were being seen regularly. It seemed that one of those had come to grief at the paws of the cat which was seen one morning carrying something across the dry lake bed. Later that day two adults and only one chick were seen, which appeared to offer confirmation of that turn of events. Two days later however, the two chicks were once more in view, both alive and well. It remains

unclear what the cat was carrying.

The rainfall late in the year which prolonged the status of Widgery Lake, was not sufficient however to fill our water tanks. A third tank was installed in late October, but it came too late to benefit from heavy rainfall earlier in the spring. Consequently we once more began the busy summer season with a diminishing supply, which also meant that, on the eve of the field course, the local water tanker was once again called upon. It should be a different story later in the year and we hope to start the next season with all tanks full.

Hanging around the main shorebird flocks at Miranda this season have been the usual regulars – twenty or so Turnstones, eight Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, one Pectoral Sandpiper, several dozen Golden Plover and two Red-necked Stints. All the usual suspects except one. Missing from that list is Terek Sandpiper, for which there has thus far been no record since December 2007. From my recollection this is the first season during my time at Miranda that no Terek has turned up, there usually being at least one and often two seen sometime over the summer.

Breeding across much of northern Russia, Tereks spend the northern winter anywhere from the coasts of the southern half of Africa, across south Asia to Australia. While they

regularly turn up in New Zealand, it is generally only in small numbers, the maximum record being 14 birds in 1979-80, but the more usual being one or two. This country therefore must be considered the extreme edge of their range. Interestingly this also applies to two other species which once regularly reached New Zealand in small numbers, Eastern Curlew and Curlew Sandpiper. Records for both appear to be increasingly sparse in recent years, it being nearly ten years since the last record of regular curlew at Miranda.

The satellite telemetry on Bar-tailed Godwits in 2007 and 2008 was primarily an American project; while it was in collaboration with Massey University, the NZWSG and Miranda Shorebird Centre, it was conducted by the US Geological Survey Alaska Science Centre based in Anchorage. Funding was provided by both the David and Lucille Packard Foundation and the US government. It was this connection which aroused the curiosity of John Desrocher, United States Consul General in Auckland, and enticed him to visit Miranda in December to investigate for himself. He visited both the Centre and the roost, where a good number of godwits were on parade. Unfortunately none of the transmitter birds turned up in our scopes.


A feature of the Miranda district over the past two years has been a sculpture exhibition at Miranda Orchards. The slopes of the orchard, overlooking the Shorebird Centre



Proposed Sculpture for the Shorebird Centre grounds. Currently at the sculpture gardens at Miranda. Photo Keith Woodley

and the Firth, provide a splendid location and backdrop for a variety of pieces. One of them is an image of a godwit by Auckland sculptor Warren Viscoe. The response of any of us to a given piece of sculpture is often a very individual thing; it may speak to each

of us in entirely different ways. It may engage with some people while leaving others indifferent. Likewise with the godwit image which has drawn a mixed though mainly favourable response. However, we have been offered the opportunity to place it at

the Shorebird Centre. There is still a shortfall of \$700.00 in the \$3,000 price for the work, so if any members wish to support this acquisition, their contributions would be gratefully received. 

On being a Volunteer

Helen Cain

I'm not a serious birder. I know the difference between a New Zealand and Banded Dotterel though I couldn't tell a Great Knot from a Lesser Knot. But I've always had an interest in birds and believe passionately that we should be protecting them and their habitat against further destruction.

I'm not sure how I became a volunteer. I've always loved the drive from Orere Point down the coast and I think Miranda wove her spell on me when I was staying at the Shorebird Centre a couple of years ago. Sometime during that stay I found myself saying to Keith that I might help out from time to time (I was already a volunteer at Tiritiri Matangi Island). And having said I would, I felt I should honour that commitment.

I've never regretted it and I look forward to my days at the Centre. I generally spend one Saturday a month there but from time to time I stay overnight at the Centre (a real treat), or if I am travelling overseas there might be a gap of a few weeks between volunteer days. The volunteer system is very flexible – I write my days in the diary at the Centre or email Maria to tell her when I can work - which makes it easy for me to fit it around the rest of my life.

A day at Miranda is a complete contrast to my life as an IT Consultant in Auckland. On my volunteer days at Miranda I drive down from Auckland in time to open the Centre at 9am. I love the drive through the countryside, particularly once I turn off onto the Miranda/Kaiaua road. A day at the Centre involves talking to the visitors who come through,

directing them to the hide and of course serving in the shop. The visitors are almost without exception lovely and I really enjoy the diverse range of people who come through. From time to time there is a group staying – anything from a spinners and weavers group to participants on a field course. Some days in winter are very quiet and I always make sure I have a good book to read on those days – not a hardship.

Today as I write it's early January and I'm sitting on the deck by the ranchslider at the Centre, overlooking the pond. There's a gentle breeze rippling the reeds and every now and then a Banded Rail picks its way across the pond. Swallows swoop joyously and in the distance I can see a hawk hovering. There was a steady stream of visitors until about midday when there was a convenient break for lunch. So far today we have had visitors from as far away as Malawi, Switzerland, Denmark and England, and as near as Hamilton - a father and son who have been staying at the Centre for a couple of days and who obviously enjoyed their time.

Some of the visitors are serious birders who know a lot more than me, some are budding ornithologists or like me have a general interest in conservation, and some people are

just passing and drop in out of curiosity. The latter are often surprised and impressed with the Centre. I love telling the story of E7 and her amazing journey back to New Zealand in 2007, using the map on display to show them her migration path. Many of the visitors have heard about her or have some awareness of bird migrations but are absolutely awe struck (as I still am) when they hear her story. I sometimes talk about the destruction of habitats like Saemangeum and the impact of that on migratory species like the godwit. E7's story often captures the imagination of children especially when they see the size of a godwit, and if one child becomes interested in birds and conservation because of a visit to the Centre then that is worthwhile.


I get a lot out of my days at Miranda. I always come home feeling refreshed and energised. And at 5pm the Closed sign goes up on the gate and day I treat myself to fish and chips from Kaiaua and eat them at the beach somewhere on the coast road home. 



photo K Woodley

Voyages of Discovery

by Tony Rice 2008 Allen and Unwin
review by Keith Woodley

As Europe's Age of Discovery unfolded after the 17th century, knowledge of the natural world grew exponentially. Most early explorers, whether private or bearing a state charter, carried on board

a 'natural philosopher' or at least someone with an interest in that direction. By the late 18th century most voyages of exploration were specifically under state control, and the informed amateur had largely given way to professional naturalists and scientists. Thus Banks, Parkinson and the Forsters with Cook's voyages, and Ferdinand Bauer with Matthew Flinders, on his voyage around most of Australia in *H.M.S. Investigator*. An extraordinary legacy of such expeditions was the wealth of natural history illustrations that accumulated in institutions such as the Natural History Museum in London. From the over 500,000 works of art held there, come the selections for this beautiful book.

Ten expeditions are profiled including Cook's first two voyages and Darwin's hugely significant venture in the Beagle. Other chapters look at expeditions to Ceylon, North America, and Amazonia, as well as the famous Challenger Expedition of 1872-1876, during which the planet's oceans were investigated by science for the first time.

The first chapter gives an account of Sir Hans Sloane's voyage to Jamaica as physician to the governor in 1687-89. Sloane was an inveterate collector and for the rest of his long life built up one of the most extensive natural history collections in Europe. When the British Museum was established in 1753, it was Sloane's collection that formed the nucleus of the institution. His other, not insignificant, claim to fame was that it was he who introduced Britain and hence rest of


world, to cacao or chocolate.

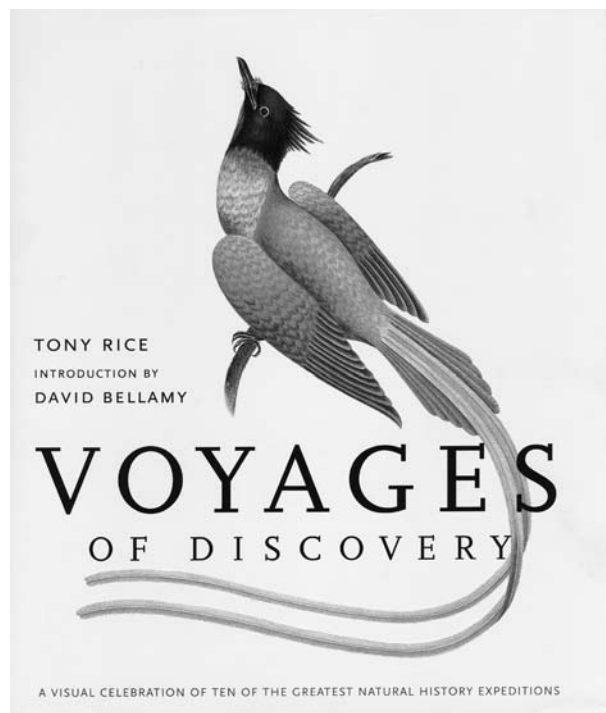
Another chapter looks at a less well known but extremely interesting illustrator. From 1699-1701 Maria Sibylla Merian travelled to the Dutch colony of Surinam, the outcome of which was an exquisite series of images of mainly invertebrates – especially beetles, moths and butterflies. At the time what was remarkable about this collection, which was greatly admired by Sloane among others, was that it was the work of a woman. Moreover, having separated from her husband, she sailed to Surinam at the age of 52 with two young children. Such circumstances would go unremarked upon today, but at the beginning of the 17th century they were uncommon to say the least. Such was the calibre of her work that many entomologists since have been able to use it as an accurate resource in the absence of actual specimens. Even Linnaeus, in his seminal *Systema Naturae*, published in 1758, based several of his accounts entirely on the work of Merian.

The voyage of Flinders and Bauer has more than a passing connection for us. Son of the court painter to one of the Princes of Liechtenstein, Bauer achieved renown as one of the greatest natural history illustrators who has ever lived. Fastidious and painstaking, his images are breathtaking in their clarity and calibre. But it was the several months he spent on Norfolk Island in 1804 while the *Investigator*

was being refitted in Port Jackson that is of interest here. For on September 27 he collected a Bar-tailed Godwit specimen which eventually travelled back to Europe in his collection. After his death in 1826, it was acquired by the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna where, in 1836, it was seen by J.F. Naumann who recognised it as being significantly different to the Bar-tailed Godwits found in Europe. He named it *Limosa lapponica baueri*, and it thus became the type specimen for the population of godwits breeding in Alaska which migrate to New Zealand and eastern Australia.

Each chapter gives an overview of the voyage and its outcome, its major participants and scientific significance. Each is then followed by up to 20 pages of sumptuous illustrations. And this is where this book becomes a treasure, for those illustrations are uniformly excellent. In the early pages there is a preponderance of botanical items, but as the reader progresses, birds and mammals, invertebrates and fish all appear.

This is something for anyone with an interest in both natural history and its illustrators. By a remarkable coincidence, it is also available at the Miranda Shorebird Centre. 



The Story of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust 1973-2000

by Stuart Chambers

review by Maria Stables-Page

This book is a rip-snorter. As a post 2000 member of Miranda Naturalists' Trust I couldn't put it down. It is a tribute to vision, persistence, tenacity, optimism, commitment and dedication. The story is well told chronologically. The narrative could easily have got bogged down in detail but instead clips along at a good pace liberally praising those who have built the Trust into what we know today.

If you were a member of the Trust prior to 2000 you will be familiar with this book. If you, like me, joined post 2000 you likely have never heard of it or seen it. Therefore, it is to the post 2000 membership that I provide my review.

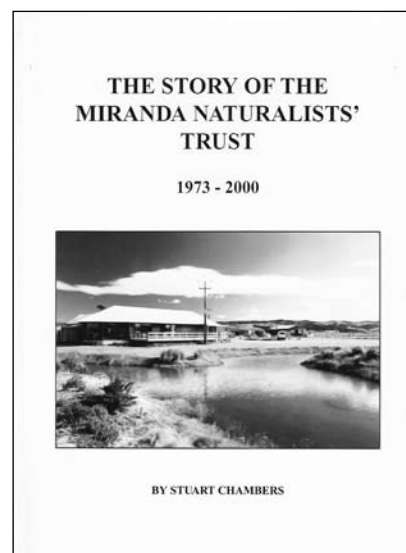
The opening chapters begin with descriptions of bicycle tours from Auckland to the Firth of Thames by Dick Sibson and friends in 1940. They established that major roosting sites of previously hunted Bar-tailed Godwits, South Island Pied Oystercatchers and our endemic Wrybills were to be found at Miranda. Bird watching in Auckland can be attributed to Dick Sibson's arrival at Kings College in 1939 where he introduced youth to the field. Throughout the 1950s bird watching caught on, stalwarts in the early years included Ross McKenzie and Graham Turbott, followed later by others including Beth and John Brown.

The vision for accommodation came about in 1973 by Beth Brown. She took that vision to an Auckland Ornithological Society meeting in 1974. Later that year the formation of a 'Wildlife Trust' at Miranda was moved and a steering committee established.

Thence began discussion on the aims of the Trust. And subsequently, 15 years fundraising and dealing with bureaucracy. It is astounding to me that the Trust had the foresight to purchase a property in Kaiaua. This gave strength to the Trust in moral and financial terms.


In 1990 bricks and mortar appeared on the newly-acquired land. However, this was only stage one and fundraising was consistently on the agenda for the completion of stages two and three. The Trust is most fortunate that many of the hardworking individuals involved in the project are still active in the organisation today. Their very important birding time was flying by poring over building consents and funding applications.

Chambers pays tribute to past chairmen, council and benefactors. At the end of the book is a list of council membership year by year, two pen and ink drawings by Keith Woodley, 12 pages of black and white photo-



graphs spanning the decades and a list of presentations made to members in recognition of their devotion to the MNT.

After reading this book you will understand why the "Free Lifetime Use of the MNT Centre" was awarded to Alison and Stuart Chambers and David Baker, "Free Use of the Sibson Room for Life" to Allan and Jocelyn Lane, and "Life Membership of the Trust" to Anthea Goodwin.

Miranda Shorebird Centre retails this book at \$12.90. However, for members it is offered at \$6.90 plus \$1.00 post and packaging. To order send a cheque for \$7.90 with your name and address to the Miranda Shorebird Centre, 283 East Coast Road, R D 3, Pokeno 2473. 

2009 Courses

Botanical Illustration (with an emphasis on techniques)
1-12 July, Tutor Sandra Morris.

NZ Dotterel Management Course 7-9 September
Tutor John Dowding.

Photographic Course 19-20 September Tutor Bruce Shanks.

Wader Identification 24 - 25 October Tutor Keith Woodley.

Field Sketching course 7-8 November Tutor Sandra Morris,

Contact the Centre for details of any of these courses!

Visitor numbers at the Shorebird Centre

Collated by Jenni Hensley, Rowena West and Gillian Vaughan


The last report on visitor numbers in Miranda News was in 2001. At the time estimated numbers of day visitors to the Shorebird Centre were hovering about 9000. Increases in publicity and awareness, along with increasing overseas visitor numbers to New Zealand have led to a steady climb in the number of people visiting the Centre each year.

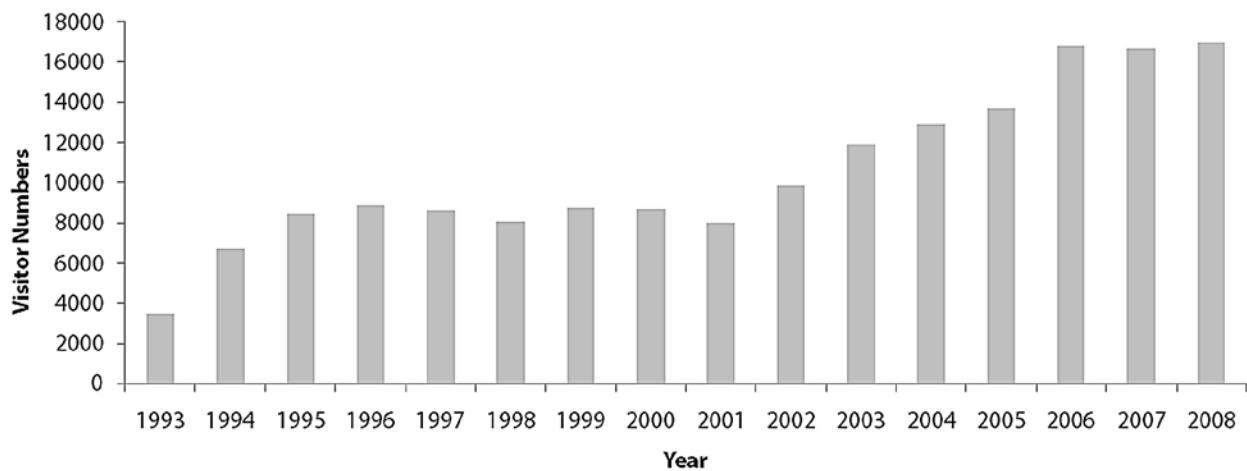
Estimates in visitor numbers are based largely on the numbers of people signing the visitors book held at the desk at the Shorebird Centre.

As not everyone who visits signs the book the actual number of people who visit are occasionally recorded and compared to the numbers who have signed the book. This information is used to provide a multiplier for the numbers in the visitors book.

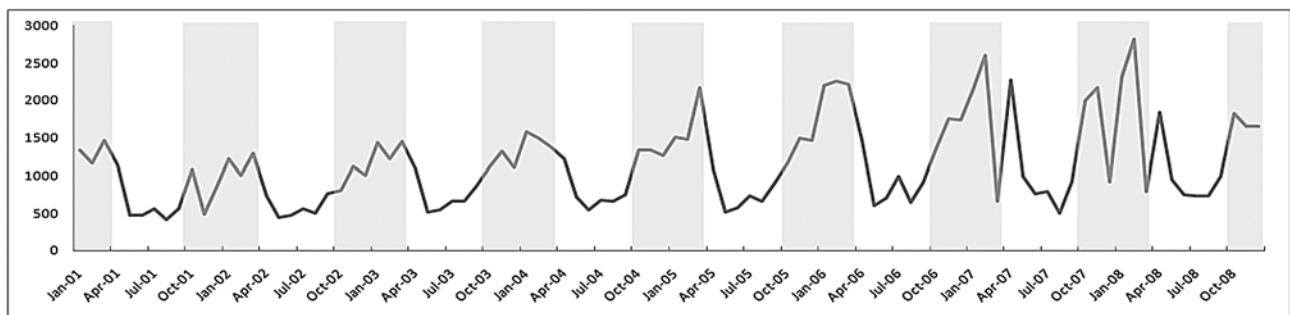
Experience has shown that as the numbers of people visiting the Shorebird Centre increases the number not signing the visitors book does as well. In part because when it is busy it can be hard to get to the visitors book, and also hard for the staff to have time to ask people to. It appears now that for every line completed in the visitors book between six and seven people visit the Centre.

Day visitor numbers are now estimated at close to 18,000 per year., rising from around eight to 9,000 in the late 1990s. Overnight visitors are estimated to add more than 3000 visitors a year, leading to a total of more than 20,000 people visiting the Centre each year.

Details on the numbers of people who visit the shellbanks, and a breakdown of visitors by country of origin will be in upcoming issues. 



This graph shows the rise in estimated day visitor numbers over the past sixteen years.



This graph shows how visitor numbers fluctuate through the year. The highlighted areas show October to March the time the arctic migrants are present at their highest numbers. Visitor numbers are at their highest the late summer period, January to March, and are low throughout the winter.

Life on a Tyre

Mags Ramsey and Becky Laidlaw

One morning during the Miranda Wader ID course in mid-November, after watching the colony of Black-billed Gulls lose all their nests to the rising high tide, Mags found that she was increasingly unable to concentrate for worrying about the fate of a particular New Zealand Dotterel nest on a rather exposed shell bank at Duder Regional Park. This shell bank is called Roost Island, as no birds had ever been stupid enough to nest on it before; even at normal high tides only a 10 by 5 metre area protrudes above the sea.



A New Zealand Dotterel nest before and after being moved onto a tyre.

Survival of the fittest is a good theory, but the potential loss of three eggs only a few days before they were due to hatch eventually got to her; she grabbed a volunteer (Hazel Speed from DoC) and drove for an hour back to Duder.

We had never seen it being done, we had just heard that it was possible, moving vulnerable clutches of precious NZ Dotterel and Variable Oystercatcher (VOC) eggs out of the reach of spring high tides by using old tyres to create height. We also knew the theory of moving eggs: move the markers beside the nest (bits of old seaweed and debris) along with the eggs, remove traces of the previous nest site, then get out

quickly and let the parent bird relax and hopefully continue incubating. Although the prospect of disturbing the nesting of these birds was daunting the certainty of our inaction causing a nest being lost to the tides seemed a considerably bigger sin than attempting to save it, but possibly causing the birds to abandon.

There were heaps of old tyres lying around so we placed one beside the nest. It was now only one egg, and as two eggs had been lost from a nearby nest, an egg predator was clearly around somewhere. Quickly filling the tyre with shell and sand we retreated into hiding to see what

would happen. After a heart stopping ten minutes or so, she eventually went back onto her eggs. Next we made a small scrape in the shells on the top and moved the eggs into it (taking care to fill in the old scrape so that the birds did not think the eggs had just been taken) and again retreated. This time she wandered round the tyre but did not take the crucial step of getting onto it. After ten more tense minutes it was clear that she was not going to find it and that as it was starting to get dark the egg would cool down and die. So we aborted the mission, pulled the tyre away and put the egg back in the original position; she wouldn't go back onto that either.

Mags Ramsey is a Park Ranger with Auckland Regional Council and for the last 6 years has, with volunteer help, been protecting the breeding dotterel at Duder Regional Park. Conscious that there were breeding dotterel at nearby beaches that had no protection at all, and were therefore likely to have very low breeding success, she and some of the volunteers formed the Friends of Tamaki Strait Dotterel and successfully applied for an Environmental Initiative Fund from Auckland Regional Council. This has been used to buy pigtailed and tape to fence nests off from the rest of the beach, signage, traps and bait. The extra sites that were monitored and protected were two beaches on the Whitford peninsula, the Waikopua estuary, Te Puru, the oyster farm by Clevedon and Kawakawa Bay. For more information on this article or if you would like to be put on the email list for updates, please contact Mags, on mags.ramsey@arc.govt.nz

Becky Laidlaw is a volunteer from Wales who came out to help monitor and protect dotterel on the coast between Whitford and Kawakawa Bay for five months. She did her Masters on wetland birds, and is soon to start a PhD in the UK on reducing predator impacts on wetland birds. Many local dotterel and VOC chicks that fledged this year, owe their lives to her, both for moving their nests and for the predators that she, and then other volunteers, trapped.

The egg was starting to feel cold so we put it in a nearby nice cosy nest and four days later it hatched. Another four days later and their original egg hatched too, though we think only one of these chicks survived to fledging. Roost Island had totally flooded, to a level above a single tyre, so the egg would definitely have been lost without intervention.

...this summer the moon was closer to the earth than usual, giving longer and higher spring tides.

The lesson learnt from our first attempt was not to leave it until the last moment; to introduce the tyre concept to the birds more gradually. We also learnt in November, and in the following months, that if we thought that there was a risk that a nest would be flooded then it certainly would be, and if we thought that a nest was high enough to be safe, then it probably wasn't. We lost several nests that we hadn't even considered at risk in those mid-November spring tides, especially with a couple of days of a stiff north-easterly behind them. We since discovered that this summer the moon was closer to the earth than usual, giving longer and higher spring tides. So whereas a 3.5 metre tide was something that usually happened once or twice a month, it now happened for several days in a row. Fore-warned is fore-armed as they say, so come the spring tides of December we were better prepared; well Becky was, as Mags had been called away to an unavoidable kayak holiday in South Island.

In December we carried the tyres out well in advance. There were seven VOC nests along the beach at the Clevedon Oyster Farm and behind each one we placed a tyre. The birds had time to get used to it before the next visit when Becky started to move the eggs gradually up the ramped 'shell way'. It usually took only 3 or 4 moves to get the eggs onto the tyre, and once there both VOC and dotterel seemed quite happy perched on the top; we

saw a VOC resting on one even after her eggs had hatched. Despite the tyres, two of these seven nests were lost to the tides.

Judging by the November spring tides even one tyre wasn't always going to be enough: especially for those foolish dotterel who had once again laid on Roost Island, unbelievably lower

down than they had last time. So, over two weeks and involving four moves the three

eggs were moved onto the top of 2 tyres staked in place. But even this not was enough to save them from being flooded when the high tides combined with a storm. Sadly two dotterel and six VOC nests that were put on single tyres, and in some cases a wheel and a tyre, met the same fate. One egg that a mildly more intelligent pair had laid on the reserve grass, well above the level of the beach, still got washed away. On the Waikopoua Estuary three dotterel eggs on the top of a tyre started hatching just too late, one egg was found washed up nearby as was a dead chick. In this case we realised that we had needed two tyres here as the difference between life and death had been only a few centimetres, as well as just a few hours.

At Kawakawa Bay Becky used the lie of the land and two tyres to create a step. (See cover photo)

Happily all three of these eggs hatched and although two of the chicks have been lost since, the third is due to fledge in mid February.

So we had more experience under our belts to draw on for the January spring tides, which reached 3.5m on four consecutive days.

Several VOC nests looked vulnerable but there was only one dotterel nest on the go at this time, our friends on Roost Island who had optimistically laid for the third time. Our plan this

time was to get their eggs onto a tyre that had a piece of corflute under it and then gradually drag the tyre the 300 metres or so needed to get it onto the main shell bank. After moving the nest together, Becky subtly slipped into the bushes nearby, while Mags walked obviously away to make them think that the threat had gone. We thought they would go back on the nest quicker this way and that we would also know whether the female had accepted the change rather than guess or hope. This worked until Becky was spotted and had to find another position, about 50 m down the beach, to retreat to as she moved the nest after ten minutes of incubating. This method of continued movement of the nest seemed to be working well and with the birds happily returning to the nest less than five minutes after Becky had moved it had the potential to see the birds to safe ground within the century. However, after around seven moves, with well over 150 m to go, the dotterels sadly abandoned the nest.

Mags also failed in an attempt to move a VOC clutch of two eggs up to two tyres high at Duder. Already on one tyre she suspected this wasn't going to be enough when she saw that the 3.5m tide with no wind was halfway up the sides. So that evening she very gradually introduced a single tyre beside

the difference between life and death had been only a few centimetres, as well as just a few hours

them with another tyre slung halfway on top of it. However introducing the two tyres at once caused them to leave their eggs so a tyre was removed.

The next morning Mags managed to get them to return to their eggs on top of a sand stack balanced on the original tyre but couldn't get them to move over to the second tyre even though they were at the same height. There was no wind again and as the tide was supposed to be the same as the previous day, (3.5m) she hoped it would survive until she got back to

do another move that afternoon. It didn't, all washed away, and the lesson learnt here was that a predicted height of 3.5m is only an approximation. She wishes with the black tinted glasses of hindsight that she had just stayed another 20 minutes that morning.

So conclusions – is moving nests worth the time and angst? If dotterel and VOC lose their first clutch to a spring tide, and it then takes them a few days to lay another, because they have a 28 day incubation period they will inevitably be caught by the next month's spring tides, and the next and the next. Laying unsuccessfully two to three times produces no chicks and puts the valuable adult birds at risk for a much longer period. So giving them a helping hand is easily justifiable, especially as we were also spending time on predator control.

Some might argue that we should let natural selection do its job, but there are now so many unnatural variables stacked against our shorebirds, including the modified state of our beaches, human activities, and unnaturally rising sea levels. We weren't selectionist enough to twiddle our thumbs while precious eggs drowned.

We know of two clutches of eggs that were lost to predation after being on tyres, but they may have been lost anyway. All the others survived even though to our eyes they looked incredibly obvious.

Tips for a successful retyrement? Start earlier than the tide time tables suggests is necessary, take lots of time to do it. Get well out of the way after each move, two tourists had, unasked, moved a VOC nest up a beach at Motuihe in January and the pair abandoned. We suspect that either they stayed too close to the birds, or that there were other people in the immediate vicinity. A few moves over several days gives the birds more time to adjust than many moves on the same day. If our efforts this summer have taught us anything, it is the need to think laterally and more often than not, a little bit vertically 🐦



A NZ Dotterel nest moved onto two tyres on Roost Island was still lost.



This Variable Oystercatcher nest at Duder survived this tide, but not the next.



At Clevedon this Variable Oystercatcher nest was on two tyres, the nest was still lost.

Images From The Photography Course

Bruce Shanks

The 2008 photography course was held at the Shorebird Centre on the 29th to 31st of August. Tutor Bruce Shanks is an award winning Nature Photographer with a 50 year background in the Photographic Society of NZ where he holds a triple Fellowship.

The course included an introduction to the essentials of photography “painting with light” and the equipment used to do this, the understanding of light, exposure, apertures, shutter speeds, depth of field, focussing, choice of lenses and support equipment such as tripods, monopods, groundpods, bean bags.

Field work included watching the light and wind on water, land and of course birds, how to approach birds without getting them twitchy, as photographers are generally required to approach much closer than bird-watchers who use telescopes and binoculars.

Practical sessions were scheduled at dawn and dusk “weather and light permitting”; these coincided with the full tides, and were held down at the stilt-ponds and shell banks.

Our first practical session was at dawn on Saturday morning, the light was indifferent but we had about 5

minutes of brilliant light, where the sun projected its rays through a slit above the hills of the Coromandel peninsula and a layer of cloud. These strong directional rays gave students a great vision of good texture lighting.

The Saturday evening session was cold, bleak, and very dull and windy, but the eager students could not be discouraged from, what really were non-suitable photographic conditions. Probably a good lesson was learnt.


Sunday morning, we had a colourful sunrise followed by good lighting and a very co-operative “resident” Kotuku. Many of the course participants were able to put their learning to the test, with some doing a very careful and successful stalk of the Kotuku one member getting to about 5 metres from the bird.

Other subjects covered included:



G King

- a discussion on hides and how to put them up;
- suitable clothing, for weather, sun, camouflage etc.
- photographing birds in flight, wetland birds, shorebirds, bush birds, garden birds and birds of the field, birds at the nest, etc;
- where to photograph birds in NZ;
- downloading, storing and after-work on images, including brief forays into Lightroom and Photoshop;
- a mixture of lectures, including audio-visual presentation, with images, practical sessions, discussion about equipment, and the practicalities of bird photography in general (as opposed to just wader photography);
- theory lectures including viewing some of the tutor's own images, discussing how they were taken, techniques, etc.

In general the course  eared to be a

Images on back cover:

Top Left: Marton Lieszen.

Marton was using a 200mm lens on his Canon 40D and took particular note of the skills required for a successful stalk as he crawled to within 5 metres of the bird

Top Right: Martin Sanders

Early morning light silhouettes the course participants.

Centre: Martin Sanders

with the 4 Mallards flying high, counterbalanced by the stark contrast of rushes within the stilt ponds, linked by a moody sky, and the atmospheric details of the hills and valleys of the Coromandel range in the background, this is a complex but very satisfying image.

Bottom Left Jonathan Cope.

Bottom Right: Noel Knight

Both images put into practice elements of composition and texture from the “Painting with Light” segment of the course.



Kotuku by Joanne Bizo

Keep up-to-date with events
visit
www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz



MNT People:

Shorebird Centre Manager:

Keith Woodley,
shorebird@farmside.co.nz

Assistant Manager

Maria Stables-Page topcats@ihug.co.nz
The Shorebird Centre
283 East Coast Road
RD 3 Pokeno 2473
phone/fax (09) 232 2781

Chairman: David Lawrie

R.D. 2, Pukekohe. Phone (09) 238-8407.

Deputy Chairman and Banding Convenor:

Adrian Riegen, 231 Forest Hill Road,
Auckland 8. phone/fax: (09) 814- 9741.
email riegen@xtra.co.nz

Secretary: Will Perry

34 Morrin St, Ellerslie, Auckland. Phone
(09) 525-2771 hm; (09) 526-1944 wk; (09)
526-1960 fax (wk)

Treasurer: Ashley Reid

1 Picquet Hill Road, Te Awamutu. Phone
(07) 871-5729.
email: reid.AandS@xtra.co.nz.

Editor: Gillian Vaughan

82 Redhill Road Papakura.
ph (09) 298 2500 Fax (wk) (09) 522- 5518
email: gillianv@actrix.co.nz

Council:

David Lawrie (Chairman)
Adrian Riegen (Deputy Chairman)
William Perry (Secretary)
Ashley Reid (Treasurer)
Eila Lawton Emma Stanyard
Len Taylor Estella Lee
Phil Hammond Sue Reid
Wendy Hare Gillian Vaughan
Keith Thompson
John Gale (Ex officio)

Bequests



Remember the Miranda Naturalists' Trust in your will and ensure that our vital work in education and protection of the migratory shorebirds can continue. For further information and a copy of our legacy letter contact the Shorebird Centre.

Situated on the Firth of Thames between Kaiaua and the Miranda Hot Pools, the Miranda Shorebird Centre provides a base for birders right where the birds are. The best time to see the birds is two to three hours either side of high tide. The Miranda high tide is 30 minutes before the Auckland (Waitemata) tide. Drop in to investigate, or come and stay a night or two.

Accommodation

The Shorebird Centre has bunkrooms for hire and two self-contained flats:

Per bed / night member \$ 15.00	Per bed / night non-member \$ 20.00
Hire of Sandpiper member \$ 50.00	Hire of Sandpiper non-member \$ 60.00
Hire of Whimbrel member \$ 50.00	Hire of Whimbrel non-member \$ 65.00

For further information contact the Shorebird Centre, RD3 Pokeno 2473
Phone /Fax (09) 232 2781 shorebird@farmside.co.nz

Help support the Trust's efforts to educate and promote conservation awareness.

Membership of the Trust entitles you to:

Four Miranda News issues per year.
A discount on overnight accommodation
Invitations to Trust Events
The right to attend the AGM
The right to vote for council members

Membership Rates :

Ordinary Member - \$ 40.00
Family Member - \$ 50.00
Overseas Member- \$ 50.00
Life Member, under 50 - \$ 1200
Life Member, 50 & over - \$ 600

Want to be involved?

Friends of Miranda

A volunteer group which helps look after the Shorebird Centre. If you'd like to help out contact Keith. Helping out can be anything from assisting with the shop, school groups or meeting people down at the shellbanks. Regular days for volunteer training are held. Contact Maria for details.

Long term Volunteers

Spend four weeks or more on the shoreline at Miranda. If you are interested in staffing the visitor centre, helping with school groups or talking to people on the shellbank for a few weeks contact Keith to discuss options. Free accommodation is available in one of the bunkrooms. Use of a bicycle will be available.

The Miranda Garden

Help in the garden around the centre. A feature of the grounds is a pond with an island in the middle. At various times of the year Banded Rail, Bittern and Mallards use the pond. A walkway around the pond is in grass with flax and other native vegetation to the edges. To the south of the garden is an attractive Cabbage Tree grove with a seat and good views over the pond. From 1 September to 1 May, gardening days are the second and fourth Saturdays in the month. Over the winter months gardening days, ably led by Dr Keith Thompson are the fourth Saturday in the month. Meet at the centre anytime after 10.00 am. Stay overnight! Free use of bunkroom accommodation is a perk - and it's not all about gardening. We make plenty of time during the day to sample cheesecake! And of course, there are the birds. We have lots of fun. Why not join us? Contact the Centre for details.

Firth of Thames Census

Run by OSNZ and held twice a year the Census days are a good chance to get involved with ongoing field work and research.

The Magazine

Never forget you are welcome to contribute to the MNT NEWS! To discuss your idea contact Gillian Vaughan, gillianv@actrix.co.nz.

